NARRATIVE OF A CONVERSATION IN WHICH PASCAL RELATED THE PLAN AND SUBSTANCE OF HIS CONTEMPLATED WORK ON RELIGION.

IT HAPPENED ON a certain occasion, about ten or twelve years since, that M. Pascal was induced to deliver what he had revolved in his mind upon the subject above referred to, in the way of verbal relation. It was done in the presence, and at the request of, several of his friends; and, among them, some of considerable distinction. He unfolded to them on this occasion, in a few words, the plan of his entire work; he described the subject, and the proposed matter; briefly recapitulated the reasons which had induced the undertaking, and the principles upon which it was to be founded; and explained the order and connexion he intended to pursue. And those persons, than whom none were more competent to judge of these things, reported that they never heard a more beautiful address, or one more powerful, affecting, and convincing. They were delighted with what they heard; and from the specimen thus afforded, in a discourse carried on for a period of between two and three hours, delivered on the spur of the moment, and without effort or premeditation, they drew the most exalted conclusions of the projected work, if it should ever be carried into full execution by one with whose powers they were so well acquainted, one so matured in literary composition, and one, especially, whose fastidiousness of taste in his writings was so great. He was, indeed, rarely satisfied with his first conceptions, however good they might appear to others; and was accustomed to transcribe as frequently as six or eight times, compositions which ordinary readers deemed as perfect as they could be from their very first transmission to paper.

After having explained to his hearers what kind of demonstrations were wont the most to impress, and produce conviction in the minds of men, he proceeded to

show that the Christian religion bore marks of authority and certainty as great as any of those things which are received by mankind as most indubitable and established.

He opened his scheme by drawing a portraiture of man; in which he omitted nothing that could contribute, externally or internally, to a faithful resemblance, even to the most secret recesses and movements of the heart. He then supposed the case of a man, who, having passed his life in ignorance of and indifference to everything, and especially himself, is brought, at length, to contemplate himself by this portraiture, and to consider what he really is. In this review, he discovers with surprise a multitude of things upon which he had never before reflected, A vivid representation, and one that excited the astonishment and admiration of all, was made by the speaker, of both the grandeur and the baseness of man; of his capabilities and his feebleness; the uncertainties and obscurity which surround him on all sides; and the endless contradictions which cross and mingle in his nature. The least enlightened could not, after such a revelation, relapse into indifference; and however insensible they might heretofore have been, they could not but desire, after being thus shown their present state, to know more of the original purposes of their creation, and their future destiny.

M. Pascal having succeeded in exciting a desire to seek the solution of these momentous uncertainties, addressed himself first to those of philosophical minds: and, after unfolding to them all that the most eminent teachers of every sect had inculcated upon the subject of man, he showed such defects, such inconclusiveness, so many contradictions, and so much falsehood, in all their theories, as to make it evident to persons of that description, that it was not in such instructors that any confidence was to be placed.

He then made them accompany him in a survey of all the countries of the world, and all periods of time, and observe the infinitude of religious systems that had prevailed: but he led them to see at the same time, that all these systems so abound with vanity, folly, errors, sophistry, and extravagance, that there is nothing in them really satisfying to the soul.

He then called their attention to the Jewish nation, and fixed their view on the extraordinary circumstances of their history. After describing all the singularities of this people, he paused to remark particularly the influence exercised over them by the means of a single Book, comprehending alike their history, their law, and their religion. He no sooner (said he) opens this book, than he learns that this world is the creation of one God; and that the same God has created man in his own image, and endowed him with all those qualities of body and mind that befitted such an origin. If there were no corroboration of this truth from other sources, reason alone would suffice to show, that there is more probability in this supposition, — that one great Being, a God, is the author of man, and of all things in the entire universe, — than in the various fancies which these same men have devised by their unaided reason. He is, however, arrested at this point by perceiving, in the delineation he has given of man, that he is now very far from possessing all those advantages which he enjoyed when he passed out of the hands of his Maker. But he does not remain long under this difficulty; for, as he pursues his study of the same book, he finds that, &fter man had been created by God in a state of innocence, and in the possession of every perfection, his first act was to rebel against his Creator, and employ the high qualifications he had received at his hand, as instruments of offence against him.

M. Pascal then went on to show that this crime, being in all its circumstances the most heinous that could have been committed, had been punished, not only in the person of this first man, but in his descendants also; to whom this first transgressor communicated his own misery, weakness, and corruption, and will continue so to communicate it, as long as time shall last.

He now pointed out various passages in the book, in which this truth is revealed. He called attention to the fact that, in it, man is never spoken of but with reference to this state of impotence and disorder; that in various parts it is stated, that all flesh is corrupt, that men have given themselves up to evil inclinations, and are prone to sin from their birth. He made his hearers remark, that this first fall is the source, not only of whatever is most inexplicable in man’s nature, but

also of a multitude of circumstances, external to him, and of which he knows not the causes. Finally, he showed that human nature is faithfully depicted throughout the book, and is in every respect conformable to the representation made by himself at the outset.

The speaker next proceeded to open the sources of consolation which the book contained. He pointed out the statements therein made, that the remedy for these evils must proceed from the hand of God; that he is willing to be entreated of by us for assistance; and engages even to provide a Deliverer for man, — one who shall make satisfaction in his stead, and supply his own deficiencies and impotence.

After making a number of forcible remarks upon this remarkable book, he desired them to notice, that it is the only one which has ever spoken in a becoming manner of the Supreme Being, and furnished any just idea of a religion entitled to credibility. He laid down for consideration the most obvious marks of such a system; applying them to that which the book in question inculcates; and he drew the especial attention of his auditors to a feature which he deemed the essence of true religion, — the love of the God which is professed to be adored; — a character, altogether peculiar to this one religious system, and which visibly distinguishes it from every other; whose falsehood is, in fact, apparent from the want of this essential feature.

Hitherto, M. Pascal, while preparing his hearer's minds, and insensibly leading them to his conclusions, had laid down no positive proofs of the truths he wished to establish; he, however, had brought them into a disposition to receive them with readiness, and even heartily to desire that those proofs might be found solid and well founded, inasmuch as they were so obviously conducive to the tranquillity of the spirit, and the clearing up of its uncertainties. They were in that state of mind, which would be natural to all reasonable persons following out such a train of reasoning as had been thus furnished; and it could be little doubted, that, after such a preparation, they would easily yield conviction to the arguments

which their instructor next brought forward, to confirm and establish those important verities which form the foundation of the Christian religion.

Proceeding, then, to furnish a brief view of those proofs, after showing, generally, that the truths under discussion were really contained in this book, the authenticity of which no person of competent understanding could doubt, he paused principally upon the writings of Moses, in which these revelations are chiefly comprised; and he made it apparent, by a large number of indubitable coincidences, that it was equally impossible that Moses should have left on record a mere collection of falsehoods, and that the people to whom they were delivered, would have allowed themselves to be so imposed upon.

He then went over the principal Miracles recorded in the work; and as they are most important supports of the religious system taught therein, he proved it to be impossible that they should not be true; not only on the authority of the writings in which they are recorded, but from all the accompanying circumstances from which they derive corroboration.

He next explained the figurative character of the entire law of Moses; showed how all that had befallen the Jewish nation was only a type of those truths which were accomplished at the coming of the Messiah; and that the veil which concealed these figures having been raised, it was easy to trace the accomplishment and perfect consummation of them, in favour of those who have received Jesus Christ.

M. Pascal next proceeded to prove the truth of religion from Prophecy; and on this head he enlarged more than on the preceding. Having made these questions the subject of deep study, and entertaining upon them certain views of a nature wholly original, he explained them with great clearness; he unfolded their meaning and fulfilment, with surprising exactitude, and brought them before his hearers in all their lucidness and force.

Lastly, after going through the Books of the Old Testament, and making various striking observations upon their contents, in reference to the fundamental

evidences of revelation, he proceeded to those of the New Testament, and deduced from them also his crowning proofs of the truth of the Gospel.

He began with Christ; and although he had incontrovertibly established his divine mission out of the prophecies, and the symbols of the law, whose entire accomplishment centred in him, he adduced various evidences to the same effect, from his personal qualifications, his miracles, his doctrines, and all the circumstances of his life, and tenor of his actions.

He then descanted upon the character of the chosen Apostles; and, in order to establish the truth of the faith which they were commissioned universally to publish, after showing that they could only be charged with falsehood on one of two suppositions, — that they were deceivers themselves, or had in their turn been made dupes; he made it apparent that both these suppositions were equally impossible.

Finally, omitting nothing that could confirm the veracity of the Gospel history, he concluded with a variety of beautiful and impressive remarks upon the New Testament books themselves; — upon the style of the Evangelists, and their personal history; upon the Apostles, and their several writings; the multitude of Miracles, the Martyrs, and the Saints: in a word, on the various and copious evidences by which the Christian religion is so triumphantly established. And, although the limited nature of his discourse did not allow him to treat these various topics with all that Copiousness which his projected work contemplated; what he brought forward was abundantly sufficient to prove, that all these things were no work of man; and that it was an Infinite Mind alone which could have devised the concurrence of so vast a multitude of events, for proving, in the most incontestable manner, the truth of that religion, which God himself came down from heaven to establish among men.

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The above is the substance of the discourse on this occasion, which was delivered to the assembled audience, only as an epitome of the great work which the speaker was contemplating; and it is from the reports of some persons present, that the small portion here furnished has been collected.